

August 1999

Weeding a SciTech Monograph Collection

Sara Tompson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://jdc.jefferson.edu/scitechnews>

[Let us know how access to this document benefits you](#)

Recommended Citation

Tompson, Sara (1999) "Weeding a SciTech Monograph Collection," *Sci-Tech News*: Vol. 53: Iss. 3, Article 4.
Available at: <http://jdc.jefferson.edu/scitechnews/vol53/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Jefferson Digital Commons. The Jefferson Digital Commons is a service of Thomas Jefferson University's [Center for Teaching and Learning \(CTL\)](#). The Commons is a showcase for Jefferson books and journals, peer-reviewed scholarly publications, unique historical collections from the University archives, and teaching tools. The Jefferson Digital Commons allows researchers and interested readers anywhere in the world to learn about and keep up to date with Jefferson scholarship. This article has been accepted for inclusion in *Sci-Tech News* by an authorized administrator of the Jefferson Digital Commons. For more information, please contact: JeffersonDigitalCommons@jefferson.edu.

WEEDING A SCITECH MONOGRAPH COLLECTION

By SARA TOMPSON

Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (Fermilab)



I decided to tackle weeding of the main monograph collection in our sci-tech library during the summer of 1998. The library collection is focused on high-energy physics, but also includes engineering, computer science and environmental health and safety resources.

The Library was developed during 1972-73. The collection had never been weeded! By last summer, I had been at the library long enough to note that many of the books were 30 and even 40 years old (some were donated at start-up), and many of these (as well as some others) were not being used. Plus, we were running out of shelf space. Clearly a pruning was long overdue!

My Library Advisory Committee has instilled in me data gathering and analysis techniques, so I knew I would need to systematically gather information both on the characteristics of our monograph collection, and on the body of literature on collection weeding. To get a more rigorous handle on collection usage, I worked with our Systems Librarian to create a (long) list of all materials uncirculated for at least the past four years. This was the quantitative data.

Weeding based on usage is a common library practice. A number of studies have supported this approach. See, for example:

Trueswell, Richard W. "Growing Libraries: Who Needs Them? A Statistical Basis for the No-Growth Collection" In: Gore, Daniel, ed. *Farewell to Alexandria: solutions to space growth and performance problems of libraries*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press; 1976; p. 72-104.

Reed, Lawrence L. and Erickson, Rodney. "Weeding: A Quantitative and Qualitative Approach." *Library Acquisitions: Practice and Theory*. 17:175-181;1993. (Usage data discussed on pp. 175-176).

"One rule of thumb suggests that fewer than six circulations in one year makes a book a good candidate for discarding." Carey, Cathy. *Survival weeding. Collection Building*. 10 (3-4); 20;1990.

However, the best practice is now generally thought to be a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to weeding. Guidelines in a collection development policy, while more typically applied to acquisition, are just as appropriate for weeding or deselection. These can be combined with circulation data. An especially useful article on this combined approach is:

Joswich, Kathleen E.; Stierman, John P. *Systematic reference weeding: a workable model. Collection Management*. 18(1-2); 103-117; 1993.

These authors note that: "A collection development policy ...[should] provide a theoretical basis for weeding decisions." (p.107). I developed our weeding guidelines to include the topical areas covered in our collection development policy, plus the following considerations:

- * Relevance
- * Usage
- * Cost-effectiveness
- * Currency of material
- * Authority (i.e., is it a trusted source)
- * Coherence of series.

After discussing the planned weeding project at length with both the Library staff members and the Library Advisory Committee, these additional points were added to the weeding guidelines:

- * Retain books by authors of renown
- * Retain books by authors with Fermilab connections
- * Avoid multiple copies of all but very heavily used works (i.e. weed duplicates of most items)
- * Retain a book if it is the only representative of a topic (until we can buy newer books)
- * Consider whether or not Fermilab is the only OCLC holding location (lesser consideration than the above, as we are not

charged with archival responsibility, nor do we have as broad a mission as a university library)

The library literature on weeding covers mainly academic and public libraries. Almost all of the stories I found of library users' disgruntlement or even violent protest over weeding took place in public library settings. See for example Murray Martin's discussion of the Library Friends group protesting at the San Francisco Public Library and the City Controller of Philadelphia assailing the Philadelphia Free Library (in his

"Weeding or Deaccessioning" in *Technicalities*. 17(7): 16; 1997. One article did note faculty issues with weeding: "Faculty member who are not invited to participate and who do not understand the process used [in weeding] tend to distrust the process and develop negative feelings about it." (Reed, Lawrence L. and Rodney Erickson.

"Weeding: a quantitative and qualitative approach. *Library Acquisitions: Practice and Theory*." 17: 179; 1993. Nevertheless I did not anticipate problems with our user population, particularly because the Library Advisory Committee was supportive.

I don't want to go into excruciating detail of our difficulties. I worked hard to get my department manager's and her boss' support before the project, and did. I also got the Library Advisory Committee's buy-in, as mentioned above. I should have worked harder with staff and with the whole user population! After I actually started removing some books from the collection, some unexpected protests arose, both from library staff and from users. Some of these protests were right to top management, and our fist inkling of the complaints came when my boss was called in to explain the project!

The protestors were all focused on books as books; they were opposed in principal to discarding any books. I came across the following article while in the midst of dealing with these protests, and found the author's words practical and supportive. She likens a bibliophile to a "gourmand" (indiscriminate love of books) and a librarian weeding a collection to a "gourmet" (a selective lover of books)! In an article discussing her weeding project, she admits to being naturally a gourmand, but converting to a gourmet for the sake of her information service: "Bluntly, my responsibility to the quality of information I provide to our students is greater than my responsibility to the books qua books." Berson, Robin, "Schools of thought: to weed or not to weed."

Wilson Library Bulletin. 69(10): 71, 1995 June.

Besides digging even deeper into our professional literature for guidance while dealing with these protests, I also called my PAM Division chair, Brenda Corbin, and offered to do a panel on weeding at the next SLA conference. I really wanted to share my lessons learned to save some colleagues some pain! This article is based on that presentation, entitled "Gardening Tips for Painless Collection Weeding," which was presented June 7, 1999 in Minneapolis. An overview of that presentation is on the Web at:

<http://web.wva.com/~sarat/pamweed/>

To conclude this overview of my experience: my boss and I met or talked with the main protestors, as well as with top management, and eventually calm was restored. Some key lessons learned from this experience include:

- * Cultivate trust and communication with your staff on the issue of weeding
- * Realize that many who work in libraries do not do well if they are uprooted from a routine with little warning
- * Coach your staff to handle change, and to roll with the cycles of a library and its collection
- * Get management support (this is especially critical if you are in a special library that is part of a non-library organization)
- * Cultivate trust and communication on the weeding issue with your Library Committee-- explain the necessity of deselection in order to allow for useful acquisition. Some libraries have even gotten Library Committee members very involved in reviewing potential discards (I had our Committee provide recommendations for replacement materials)

As Reed and Erickson (on p. 179 in their "Weeding: A Quantitative and Qualitative Approach," cited above) note: "By having a clear, defensible procedure, even faculty [and staff, I would add] who are opposed to weeding can be made to see the necessity of judicious weeding for effective collection development."

Sara Tompson, SLA-IL President and Library Administrator, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (Fermilab) PO Box 500, MS 109 Batavia, IL 60510
Ph: 630/840-6014; E-mail: sarat@fnal.gov
<http://www-lib.fnal.gov/library/sara.html>

Powerful Information Starts with Just One Click



The INSPEC Database For Physics, Electrical & Electronics Engineering, and Computing & Control

The power of a database is determined not only by the number of records it contains, but also by the quality of its indexing. With respected subject experts on staff, strict quality control practices and meticulous error-correction procedures in place, INSPEC ensures that you'll always get the targeted results you expect. Now with over 6 million records, it is still the most comprehensive English-language database in the fields of coverage.

INSPEC delivers results that are current, precise and relevant.

New! INSPEC Ondisc

For the first time, the INSPEC Database is available on CD-ROM direct from the IEE, and in a Windows environment.

*Take advantage of specially reduced prices for 1999.
Contact INSPEC for more information.*

**Come visit us at the SLA Annual Conference
and Exhibition, Booth #815/817.**



1-732-321-5575

The Power of Information
INSPEC
THE INSTITUTION OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERS